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September 27, 2006

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

As we have discussed before, Colorado continues to suffer through a prolonged, multi year drought that has decimated agricultural production across the state. A factor that exacerbated the situation in Northeast Colorado was the shutdown of 440 irrigation wells along the South Platte River earlier this summer. This shutdown occurred after crops were already planted, resulting in further strain on the already fragile agricultural economy of the region.

Unfortunately, prospects for turning these wells back on are bleak and, as a result, three counties in particular, Weld, Morgan, and Adams, have been hit especially hard. The consequences of this hardship are significant. Weld County is ranked third in the nation, and first in Colorado, in the value of agricultural products produced, and Morgan and Adams Counties also contribute significantly to Colorado's overall agricultural production.

It is with this in mind that I respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issue a waiver to increase the cap on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres from 25 percent to the maximum 30 percent in Weld, Morgan, and Adams counties so that they may utilize the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). As you know, every county in the United States is statutorily restricted to CRP acres of not more than 25 percent of the cropland within the county. Adjusting the cap in order to allow these producers access to CREP would undoubtedly provide some of the much-needed aid to the producers of this region.

The development of CREP for this three county region is a vital step in ensuring the future agricultural viability for the area. Local and state funds are available to provide

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the match required for this program. In addition, CREPs have been extremely successful in the Republican River Basins of Colorado and Nebraska, and are desperately needed to provide the same opportunities to our farmers and ranchers along the South Platte River.

Thank you for your consideration and timely action on this important request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ken Salazar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ken" and last name "Salazar" clearly distinguishable.

Ken Salazar
United States Senate